

REMARKS

Applicants thank the Examiner for the thorough consideration given the present application. Claims 1-15 are pending. Claims 11 and 13 are amended, and claim 15 is added. Claims 1 and 11 are independent. Claims 1-10 are withdrawn The Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider the rejections in view of the amendments and remarks set forth herein.

Claim for Priority

It is gratefully appreciated that the Examiner has acknowledged the Applicants' claim for foreign priority based on Japanese Patent Application No. 11-157934.

Information Disclosure Citation

Applicants thank the Examiner for considering the reference supplied with the Information Disclosure Statement filed March 23, 2004, and for providing Applicants with an initialed copy of the PTO form filed therewith.

Restriction Requirement

The Examiner has made the Restriction Requirement final, and has withdrawn claims 1-10 from further consideration.

Rejection Under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph

Claims 13/11, 13/12, and 14 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

The Examiner has set forth certain instances wherein the claim language is not clearly understood.

In order to overcome this rejection, the Applicants have amended claim 13 to correct each of the deficiencies specifically pointed out by the Examiner. The Applicants respectfully submit that the claims, as amended, particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which the Applicants regard as the invention. Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection are respectfully requested.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) and §103(a)

Claims 11, 12, 13/11, and 13/12 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Hungerford (U.S. Patent No. 2,734,510); and

claim 14 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Hungerford.

These rejections are respectfully traversed.

Amendments to Independent Claim 11

While not conceding the appropriateness of the Examiner's rejection, but merely to advance prosecution of the instant application, independent claim 11 is amended herein to recite a combination of elements directed to a sheet tobacco manufacturing system, including *inter alia*

an upstream-side forming device arranged at an upstream portion of said net conveyor, for forming a carrier sheet of nonwoven plant fibers on said net conveyor, said

upstream-side forming device including a suction box for depositing the nonwoven plant fibers on said net conveyor;

a supply device for supplying the tobacco powder layer and the carrier sheet with a binder and a liquid common to the tobacco powder layer and the carrier sheet.

The Applicants respectfully submit that the combination of elements as set forth in independent claim 11 is not disclosed or made obvious by the prior art of record, including Hungerford.

The manufacturing system of the present invention includes a supply device for supplying a binder and a liquid common to the carrier sheet and the tobacco powder layer. The binder and the liquid not only bind together the tobacco particles forming the tobacco powder layer but also bind together the plant fibers forming the carrier sheet.

By contrast, the manufacturing system disclosed in Hungerford. The manufacturing system disclosed in Hungerford (US Patent No. 2,734,510) has a device 6 for forming a base web B. However, the base web B is made from what is called "slurry" and does not correspond to the carrier sheet of the present invention, which is made of nonwoven plant fibers. For this reason, the Hunger system does not have a device corresponding to the supply device of the present invention.

The Hungerford system has a moistening device 30, but this device 30 is used to moisten the tobacco web W for easy folding of the tobacco web W and thus is not equivalent to the supply device of the present invention.

Also, in Hunderford, the laminated web obtained by folding the tobacco web W has a twofold tobacco content per unit area, compared with the tobacco web W. This means that the expansion coefficient of the laminated web relative to the tobacco content is lower than that of the sheet tobacco of the present invention. It is clear that the laminated web does not include a sheet equivalent to the carrier sheet of the present invention.

At least for the reasons explained above, the Applicants respectfully submit that the combination of elements as set forth in independent claim 11 is not disclosed or made obvious by the prior art of record, including Hungerford.

Therefore, independent claim 11 is in condition for allowance.

Dependent Claims

The Examiner will note that dependent claim 13 has been amended, and dependent claim 15 has been added to set forth additional novel features of the invention.

All dependent claims are in condition for allowance due to their dependency from allowable independent claims, or due to the additional novel features set forth therein. Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) and §103(a) are respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

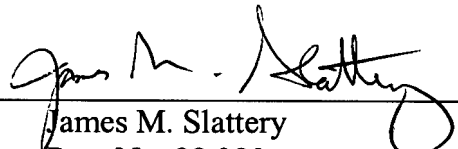
All of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. It is believed that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action, and that the present application is in condition for allowance.

If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, he is invited to telephone Carl T. Thomsen (Reg. No. 50,786) at (703) 208-4030(direct line).

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§1.16 or 1.17, particularly extension of time fees.

Date: July 23, 2007

Respectfully submitted,
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